

of copies have been printed. Selections are read aloud in Labour camps, and from the beginning of 1936 a copy was supplied to wedded couples of Aryan blood. While other political autobiographies have had to make their way by their own merits, Hitler has had the machinery of official propaganda to speed his offspring on its way. Among the books which have made history, however short our list, its place is assured, for the gospel of totalitarian government, anti-Semitism and calculated aggression proclaimed when the author was a private citizen was carried out to the letter when he became the most powerful man in the world. It has been truly said that *Mein Kampf* lets you down.

Political autobiographies no longer occupy the honoured place as historical authorities which they held a century ago when Carlyle was writing on the French Revolution.

The argument that the actor must know best what he had done, or attempted to do, breaks down again and again when it is put to the test of contemporary evidence.

Among the memorable achievements of Ranke, the greatest of professional historians, none was more needed, and none was more fruitful, than his challenge to historical memoirs, and the critical analyses scattered through his sixty volumes are an essential part of a historian's education. Written as a rule in old age or when the actor's work is done, sometimes with failing grip and often with inadequate documentary material, the political apologia needs to be studied with exceptionally critical eyes.

Even when the good faith of a witness is beyond cavil and he has nothing to conceal, tricks of memory are inevitable as the perspective changes with advancing years. It is almost always a case of *ot Dichtung und Wahrheit** Add the tendentious omissions in most specimens of this type of literature, the deliberate or sub-

conscious misrepresentation of individuals, situations and events, the urge to shift responsibility for errors on to other shoulders, the temptation both of great and small men to blow their own trumpet, and we shall begin to realize that the ground under our feet is not nearly so solid as it appears. As Sainte-Beuve tersely remarks, *Chacun n'écrit que ce qui lui sert*. Only if contemporary records are at his disposal can the conscientious historian move with confident tread. The most dangerous guides are not those whose flaming vanity or priggish self-righteousness put the reader on guard from the start, but those who attempt to conceal their bias behind a smokescreen of impartiality.